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LECTURE.

MENTAL NURSING ALONG THE LINES OF SUGGESTION AND CONSTRUCTIVE THOUGHT.

By MISS A. E. MACDONALD.

Miss Macaulay, O.B.E., R.R.C., Matron of the Kent County Mental Hospital, presided at the Lecture given by Miss A. E. Macdonald on the above subject on Saturday, the 11th ult. Miss Macaulay referred to the importance of the lecture, and said how great was the pleasure which it gave her to take the Chair on that afternoon.

Miss Macdonald, after a few introductory remarks, spoke first of the mental invalid and his needs. She said "Man is a threefold entity; made up of body, soul, and spirit, or body, mind and spirit; and the most advanced thought of to-day teaches that these three are co-related so closely that they affect each other in health and disease. In other words the mental health affects the body, and the physical health affects the mind; and both are dominated by the Spirit. Therefore we approach the subject with reverence. The mental invalid is perhaps the most pathetic figure on God's fair earth; his very helplessness and entire dependence upon those about him appeals to the finest and most chivalrous instincts we possess. Yet, his is, withal, a complicated and contradictory study. He lives in a world of his own; and in many of his seeming incoherencies, there is wisdom.

"Psycho-Analysis and Psycho-Therapy teach that in the sub-conscious mind are stored, not only the tragedies and disappointments of life, but also the 'Slippery Stones' of our ancestry; and there are other causes besides (here the lecturer gave a list of such causes). . . . One may almost say that excess is one of the most fertile causes of mental instability, whether that excess consists of too much dancing, or drink, too much frivolity, too much speculative thought, or too many religious meetings. All are alike harmful. . . . Education is their dominant need. An old farmer once said 'If you want to clean up a bit of weedy ground, plant something in it.' So by implanting wholesome worthy thoughts, unworthy and unwholesome ones disappear.

No use taking up the chilling negative theory 'You must not do this or that because it is wrong'—the patient knows where he has erred whether mentally or physically; but if you can help him to realise that in that very mind which has been violated by excess is the power to overcome, his common-sense will enable him to rise to it. It is all right to assert 'God will help you' but far more helpful to convince him of the Divine power within himself. . . . I am bound to say the most difficult mental cases are those in which the prognosis is bad through Heredity. . . . The nurse for a mental invalid should be possessed of qualities to meet his needs; a cultivated mind and refined instincts, strong and practical sympathy, accurate knowledge and skill, and with that broad outlook which sees in every patient, no matter how demented, the object of tender solicitude and care.

"What then do we mean by Suggestion Treatment? A colleague said to me one day: 'I don't think there is really much in those methods you advocate. In nursing we apply the remedies prescribed by the doctor, in faith, believing those will be effective. Isn't that the essence of Suggestion Treatment?' To which I replied: 'What you speak of is applied faith rather than any scientific measure. Of course we apply our remedies, hoping, even praying, these may be effective; but in Suggestion we hold the thought of that Relief definitely and exclusively for a given time. This Concentration of Thought (not easy in itself) is calculated to produce a certain effect upon the patient. In other words: Your thought reaches through his thought centres and is absorbed there. Of course physical invalids appropriate the thoughts of those who minister to them at once; for thought is common property. . . . Suggestion is the regular and systematic application of Constructive and Affirmative Thought to the Sub-Conscious mind of the invalid. What do we mean by constructive thought? Constructive thought is thought which affirms and upbuilds. . . . Let your thought embody his need, whether of body or mind and hold tenaciously and it will yield fruit. In suggestive treatment the mental attitude of the nurse should be assurance, confidence, certainty of success; for any hesitation or fear is at once communicated to your patient to his undoing-

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